

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2343

As Reported by House Committee On:
Education

Title: An act relating to revising the high school assessment system and graduation requirements.

Brief Description: Revising the high school assessment system and graduation requirements.

Sponsors: Representatives Quall, Santos and Haler.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Education: 2/26/07, 2/27/07 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Beginning with the class of 2008, allows students who meet the standard on the high school Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) to earn a Certificate of Achievement (CAA) and note it on their transcript, but does not require a CAA for graduation.
- Allows students who do not earn a CAA or Certification of Individual Achievement (CIA) to graduate if they complete courses and competencies that are specified in a student learning plan and intended to increase proficiency in the areas where they did not meet the standard, and if they retake the WASL annually.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Quall, Chair; Haigh, McDermott, Santos and P. Sullivan.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Barlow, Vice Chair; Priest, Ranking Minority Member; Anderson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member and Roach.

Staff: Barbara McLain (786-7383).

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Background:

Beginning with the class of 2008, most students will be required to meet the state standard on the tenth grade Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) in reading, writing, and mathematics to receive a Certificate of Academic Achievement (CAA). A CAA will be required for high school graduation. Beginning in 2010, students will also have to pass the science WASL for a CAA. Some students with disabilities will instead receive a Certificate of Individual Achievement (CIA), which is also required for graduation in 2008. In 2006, the Legislature authorized several alternative assessments for students who are unsuccessful on the high school WASL in their first two attempts. These alternatives provide different ways for students to demonstrate they meet the state standard to earn a CAA.

Summary of Bill:

Beginning in 2008, students who meet the state standard in the required subject areas of the high school WASL earn a CAA, and special education students can earn a CIA. Receipt of a CAA or CIA is noted on the student's transcript, but is not required for high school graduation.

For students who do not meet the state standard on the high school WASL, the school district must prepare a student learning plan that specifies the courses and competencies the student must complete to be eligible for graduation. These must be designed to increase the student's proficiency in the subject areas where they did not pass the WASL. The student must also retake the WASL annually until they meet the standard or graduate.

Students who do not earn a CAA or CIA are eligible for high school graduation if they successfully complete the courses and competencies specified in their student learning plan and retake the WASL annually as required.

All alternative assessment options are repealed.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) It is troubling that students are going to be required to pass a single test for high school graduation. Based on the current statistics, 30,000 students would not graduate. It is also troubling that for our minority students, as many as 75 percent would fail to graduate. The question is, are we willing to risk so many of our young people for the sake of staying the course? This alternative proposal still has high expectations. School districts will be

measured by the WASL and students will be expected to take the WASL. But it also recognizes effort and keeps students engaged. At some point, students should be expected to meet the WASL standards, but right now the system is not ready. For us to require students to pass the WASL when the system has failed them is the wrong thing to do.

Many students who do not pass the WASL are struggling with life circumstances. They are capable of learning at higher levels, but we do not have sufficient time or resources to see that students get the support they need to learn at these higher levels. The original premise was to create standards for "well-fed, well-rested, well-taught, and well-motivated" students. Thousands of our students do not fit this assumption, and we need a way to support high standards in a way that does not harm these most vulnerable students. These students need us to formally recognize that if they meet the requirements for graduation and do their best to stay in school, then they can earn a diploma even if they cannot pass the WASL.

This WASL requirement will set us back to graduation rates of the 1950s. This gives us the chance to pull back and look at the WASL, to see what changes need to be made without hurting students. There is concern about the loss of the alternative assessments. The proposal is a recognition of some significant realities. There are simply too many students failing the test and no viable alternatives. This bill recognizes a systemic problem, including underfunding of education. The level of dialog about these important issues has been elevated. This keeps students who learn differently engaged in school. The WASL is not a test of kids; it's a test of the system. The children should not be penalized.

(Opposed) We need to hold the course on reading and writing, and invest in additional support to get students the skills they need. This is not the same as keeping the status quo; there is need for change and improvement. But it is a disservice to those who have worked so hard over the last 12 years to suddenly do an about-face. The intent is appreciated, but this would be the end of education reform as we know it. We are forgetting that education reform has an equity agenda. All students should have access to equal opportunities and be able to meet a common standard. We cannot move back to a time when a lower standard was not only allowed, but supported, for some students. This takes the pressure off the system to address the needs of children who need support the most.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Quall, prime sponsor; Dr. Nick Brossoit, Edmonds School District; Raul de la Rosa; Juanita Doyon and Rachel Debellis, Parent Empowerment Network; Wendy Rader-Konofalski, Washington Education Association; Governor Booth Gardner; and Elliot Paull, Where's the Math.

(Opposed) Marc Frazer, Washington Roundtable; George Scarola, League of Education Voters; Kyra Kester, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction; and Nancy Atwood, American Electronics Association.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.